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SUBJECT: EMBASSY HOSTS DUTCH-U.S. MUSLIM DIALOGUE

THE HAGUE 00002515 001.2 OF 002

THIS MESS...

THIS MESSAGE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED.
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¶1. (U) SUMMARY. The Embassy and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund convened the mission's most extensive outreach effort to date on November 1-2 when more than 120 Dutch and American Muslims, government officials, policy experts, civil rights and business leaders gathered for intensive dialogues on social integration and managing diversity. The dialogue hosted two effective citizen-to-citizen dialogue programs attended by 72 Muslim Participants and 48 Partners. Active participation by Ambassador Arnall, other Embassy staff, and American citizens succeeded in improving the perception of American society as a whole and in dispelling many misconceptions about the treatment and situation of Muslims in America.

¶2. (U) Participants responded enthusiastically, by sharing personal experiences, acknowledging challenges, and identifying best practices for increased civic participation on both sides of the Atlantic. Press coverage was favorable with the leading Dutch daily, De Telegraaf, calling it a remarkable initiative. The Dialogue also laid the groundwork for future, broader discussions with all sectors of society on managing diversity and social integration, which will form the basis of our outreach strategy for the coming year. Please see www.diversitydialogues.nl for further information. END SUMMARY.

DIALOGUE PROCESS - BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

¶3. (U) Two years after the shocking murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Dutch-born Islamist, the Dutch remain focused on defusing social tensions associated with the country's Muslims. The Dutch continue to grapple with integration challenges and in response the Embassy hosted a conference entitled Sharing Ideas Building Bridges: a Dutch-U.S. Muslim Dialogue on November 1-2. The Embassy convened the initiative with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF), a Washington D.C. based non-profit organization working as an umbrella for 180 national organizations on diversity, social integration, and civil rights.

¶4. (U) Seventy-two Dutch and U.S. Muslims, drawn from a broad cross-section of society met as Dialogue Participants. Many, including Shaykh Muhammed Hishan Kabbani, Chairman of the Islamic Supreme Council of America, praised the Embassy for bringing together Muslims of such different ethnic backgrounds. Participants attended dialogue sessions moderated by professional facilitators on such topics as identity, civic participation, media, youth, women's issues and economic opportunity.

¶5. (U) Action plans presented by each group during the closing plenary included: combating high school drop-out rates and unemployment within minority groups; providing media training to promote a diversity of Muslim voices, promoting role models among Moroccan youth; educating Muslims and the general public about the Muslim immigrant experience and heritage; and narrowing the generation gap within Muslim immigrant communities by building stronger social networks across age demographics and experience.

¶6. (U) Some 48 Dialogue Partners met in parallel sessions. American partners included: Matt Bryza, European Deputy Assistant Secretary (DOS); Farah Pandith, Director for Middle East Regional Initiatives (NSC); Wade Henderson, President of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights;. Presenting Dutch Partners included: Maria van der Hoeven, Minister of Education; Ahmed Aboutaleb, Amsterdam Deputy Mayor; Paul Scheffer, Professor of Urban Studies at Amsterdam University and an authority on multi-cultural society; and Jo Ritzen, former Minister of Education and current President of Maastricht University.

¶6. (U) These Dialogue Partners were then invited to join the Muslim Participants during a final plenary session to provide feedback and comments on the action plans presented. Partners were also encouraged to connect with the Participants during a final lunch, evening reception, and closing dinner.

DIALOGUE LAYS GROUNDWORK FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

¶7. (U) The Dialogue successfully met its goals of building bridges among and between American and Dutch Muslims. Many

THE HAGUE 00002515 002.2 OF 002

spoke openly of the need for stronger contact networks through which mainstream Muslims can communicate and organize. Others were excited to learn of new activists and organizations in the U.S. working on these issues. Vowing to continue the momentum begun at the conference, some Americans initiated a new network of Muslims in the Washington, D.C., area and pledged to meet regularly.

¶8. (U) In addition to the action plans, a handful of initiatives arose organically during the dialogue as connections were made and ideas were shared. For example, a group of Dutch Moroccan business executives -- many meeting each other for the first time -- discussed practical solutions to increasing Moroccan representation in Dutch businesses. Another Dutch Participant described during the closing plenary how fellow participants were the missing link, helping him get funding for an upcoming job fair for minority students.

¶9. (U) In a spontaneous and motivating closing speech, Ahmed Aboutaleb, a well regarded Dutch Muslim politician, congratulated the event and reiterated the importance of building trust within our societies. Ambassador Arnall's warmly received remarks reiterated the importance of vision and encouraged all present to continue the dialogue begun during the conference. Many expressed gratitude to the Ambassador, Mrs. Arnall, and Embassy for their graciousness as co-conveners of the conference. A desire for further dialogue was a common refrain, with some calling specifically for future dialogues to include representatives

of Christian, Hindu, and Jewish communities in both countries.

COMMENT: FOCUS ON CITIZEN-TO-CITIZEN DIALOGUE

10. (SBU) Integration remains a sensitive topic in the Netherlands. Our Dutch contacts were initially skeptical about the Embassy's hosting of a Dutch-U.S. Muslim Dialogue, despite assurances from all levels, including the Ambassador, that the Embassy was not seeking to lecture the Dutch on integration matters. Press coverage was favorable however, with the leading Dutch daily, De Telegraaf, calling it a remarkable initiative.

11. (SBU) To ensure an honest and constructive dialogue, the Embassy conscientiously protected Dialogue Participants' privacy. By design, government officials, including Embassy staff, press, and Dialogue Partners, did not take part in the dialogue sessions. This approach earned Participant trust, effectively disarming those who were more skeptical of the USG's motives for holding the conference.

12. (SBU) The Embassy believes that the Dialogue's most valuable contribution was to connect knowledgeable individuals (i.e. role models) with those actively seeking guidance. Embassy strongly supports the grassroots efforts reflected in follow-on initiatives and action plans developed during the Dialogue. The Embassy will continue to provide speakers focusing on diversity and plans to continue the momentum begun at the Dialogue by convening an alumni event in the near future, perhaps in conjunction with the celebration of Martin Luther King's birthday. These activities are consistent with Secretary Rice's calls for increased engagement with Muslim communities worldwide. Moreover, they further the broader goals of fostering a richer understanding of diversity within American and Dutch societies, including the need for greater social integration, religious pluralism, and equal opportunity in housing, education, and employment.